

Former EPA Officials Agree Quality of Air Has Improved

Three former Environmental Protection Agency chiefs agreed before a Senate committee that progress has been made in improving the nation's air quality, but some Clean Air Act provisions are too complex and need to be simplified.

In the first set of Senate hearings to discuss revision of the law, which expires Sept. 30, the bipartisan ex-EPA administrators recommended different approaches but said that the act does not need a major overhaul.



William Ruckelshaus, who was the agency's first head when it was created in 1970, was the most critical of the clean-air law saying it has caused the United States to spend far more for air-pollution control than is necessary. He also recommended weighing economic factors when setting air standards.

On the other hand, Doug Costle—the most recent EPA chief—defended the viewpoint that health considerations should determine standards. He added, however, that performance requirements could be determined partially by the economic impact.

The former administrators agreed that local officials should be given more flexibility in dealing with problems, instead of

Washington imposing national standards. Although the Reagan administration's choice for administrator, Denver attorney Anne Gorsuch, is not confirmed by the Senate yet, Acting Administrator Walter Barber outlined some of his recommended "areas for review." Many congressional sources contend that Barber's testimony resembles the expected White House position on revising the act.

Barber told the committee the areas that need careful review are:

- Attainment dates, which set deadlines for areas to achieve air-purity standards. He proposes that the deadlines be removed and provisions made to allow greater consideration of economic factors and local problems in the design of plans and schedules.

- The approval process of implementation plans, which outline how states intend to clean up the air within their borders. He suggests revising the plans to allow states more direct authority to specify emission limits without detailed federal oversight.

- The health effects and scientific data available for establishing both ambient standards and hazardous emission limits. It is his recommendation that the weight of evidence and the extent of adverse health effects be considered in establishing air-quality goals.

which he claims is complex and recommends that it be reduced in scope and made consistent if economic development is to proceed.

- The mobile-source provisions, which impact on the automobile-emission standards. He proposes some relief to the automotive industry by eliminating the provisions which may not be necessary to achieve the nation's environmental goals.

Barber also called for a research program to study the acid-rain question, which

many analysts claim is caused by the sulfur-dioxide emissions produced from coal-burning factories and electrical-generating stations. Costle, however, said that enough is known to take action.

In fact, last week the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a field hearing in Maine to discuss the acid-rain problem as part of the overall Clean Air revision process.

There was a lot of support for Costle's viewpoint, congressional sources say.

More House hearings are expected in May as the debate continues.

Lawmakers Using Recess To Sway Public on Reagan's Economic Plan

Congress—from page 1
with the Congress on the tax bill and will be willing to compromise."

But Treasury Secretary Donald Regan said, "I don't know how Jones got the impression the administration was willing to compromise. . . . Our people were not there to suggest compromise but were trying to explain to Jones why he should support our program."

White House political aides feel the votes in the House are currently "too close to call," and are generally hoping the president will be able to utilize his skills as a communicator to rally support in a televised speech tentatively planned for the end of this month.

The White House will have to gather conservatives on the Senate Budget Committee back into the fold before it can regain the offensive.

No matter what course the White House takes, it is seeing a road paved with new obstacles.

The House battle is shaping up with a Democratic Party that appears to be gaining the cohesiveness it lacked early in the budget fight.

As to the budget timetable: The House Budget Committee agreed to ask for a rule that House floor action on the budget resolution would allow only a few specified amendments to be offered. Her resolution is slated for such action on April 27.

That same week, the Senate Budget Committee will reconvene and take its budget to the floor the following week.

The budget panels then must meet in conference to draft a compromise resolution, which they will take back to their chambers for final approval. The deadline for adoption of the resolution is May 15.

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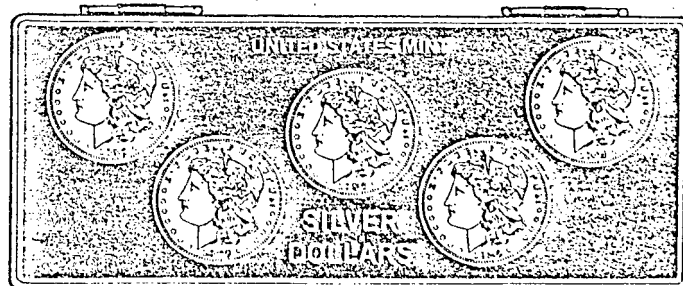
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